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For most Chinese people, the [Spring Festival](#) is a time to honor family ties, friendships and acquaintances.

This is what producers of this year's Annual Spring Festival Gala on China's national broadcaster, CCTV, probably had in mind when they agreed to include a [comedy skit](#) about the growing ties between China and African countries called "Celebrating Together" (同喜同乐).

In a celebration of Sino-African friendship, what could go wrong? In fact, quite a lot.

The 13-minute long skit opens with dozens of African performers, alongside antelopes and a lion, dancing to the tune of Shakira's "Waka Waka", all rejoicing over the opening of the China-built Nairobi to Mombasa Railway. They are joined by a group of Kenyan train attendants and the female lead, a Gabonese actress speaking fluent Mandarin.

2018 - China - CCTV's Lunar New Year TV Gala Showcase 'Racist Blackface' Afric...

CCTV's 2018 Lunar New Year TV Gala.

And, then, a well-known Chinese actress in full blackface comes on stage wearing a colorful yellow dress, fully equipped with oversized butt pads, carrying a fruit plate on her head and leading a cheerful monkey played by an unidentified African actor.

In less than 12 hours, descriptions of the skit were all over [international media](#) – always ready to run a “China, the foe” story. Turning to the Twittersphere, the public opinion thermometer of the 21st century, journalists found a divided audience: many called it racist, others argued it was not.



Huizit

@iamHuizit

CCTV's racist show during Spring Gala shook me and made me so ashamed of China and my people. They literally had blackface on stage, had an African actor to play a monkey and a African actress yelling “I love China!” Racism is global y'all...

8:37 PM - Feb 15, 2018

3,333

1,519 people are talking about this



雨曦。🌸🌸。
@yuxisushi

CHINA WHYYYYYY. i'm watching the cctv spring festival new year's gala and there's straight up blackface, i just don't know what to do with this level of offensive oh my GOD

9:49 AM - Feb 15, 2018

See 雨曦。🌸🌸.'s other Tweets

The skit might not have been ill-intentioned. But it was both culturally and racially insensitive. It also reeked of propaganda and relied on all the stereotypes about Africa that Chinese media claim to be debunking in their public diplomacy activities in the continent.

Chinese representation of Africa

It is not the first time that a Chinese state-sanctioned production has misrepresented Africa and African people in such a grotesque way. Last summer, the movie “[Wolf Warrior 2](#)”, the highest-grossing Chinese film ever, managed to bring together in a single movie all the clichés of Hollywood’s white-savior sub-genre: an unnamed African country affected by a deadly disease descends into chaos as civil war erupts. That is, until a Chinese mercenary comes to the rescue.

All film scripts in China [must be pre-approved](#) before production starts and they must get a final green light before they’re released. CCTV’s Spring Festival Gala also goes through multiple stages of supervision. Sometimes movies and TV acts are tossed out because a red flag is raised. That clearly didn’t happen this time.

Neither “Wolf Warrior 2” nor the Spring Festival Gala were conceived with

global audiences in mind. They are cultural artifacts that speak to domestic audiences and, as such, they are tuned to the so-called “[main melody](#)”, a concept often attributed to China’s president in the 1990s, [Jiang Zemin](#). Cultural products that dance to the main melody need to be aesthetically attractive to the masses, but remain politically aligned with the doctrine of the Communist Party.

China has a different repertoire for global audiences. As part of its quest to improve its image overseas, Beijing has promoted the expansion of companies like CGTN, Xinhua, China Daily and StarTimes. All have a strong presence in Africa, where they claim to be presenting a different view of the continent and its people.

These efforts are hit hard every time a gaffe, such as the CCTV’s skit, goes on air.

Savannas and safaris

Chinese media portray Africa in stereotypes not dissimilar to the rest of the world. The continent is routinely treated as a single unit, erasing its linguistic, racial and cultural diversity. It is often associated with clichéd images such as savannas and safaris and its transformations over the last 30 years reduced to a market logic under the tagline “Africa rising”.

While misrepresentations of Africa are not an exclusive problem of Chinese media, two things set China apart.

As the release of “[Black Panther](#)” has shown, many in the US are ready to engage in an open discussion about how the US movie industry has, for

decades, failed to address racial biases.

In China, criticism of the CCTV African skit [on social media has been censored](#). This is not surprising, given that, every year, Chinese censors work hard to erase negative comments of a show that has gone from being a must-watch for many Chinese families to a source of memes and jokes for younger generations.

This suggests that China needs to have a conversation about racial insensitivity, which is too common and too often dismissed as cultural specificity. The cultural specificity argument goes like this: while something might be considered offensive in the “West” (for example, blackface), it is not in China, and, therefore, there is no need to feel offended by it.

Hard to say sorry

For a long time Beijing has kept a double narrative going in its media strategy—one for domestic consumption and another one for global audiences. This worked in a pre-Internet era.

If China wants to be viewed as a responsible global actor, it needs to find appropriate ways to prevent controversies such as the one created by the offensive CCTV skit. It could, for example, seek out African specialists at Chinese universities to offer expert advice.

More importantly, when errors are made—and Chinese leaders need to accept that nobody is infallible – Beijing needs to be ready to acknowledge them.

Foreign companies, and sometimes foreign media, are forced to issue an

apology when their actions are deemed to hurt Chinese people. Will CCTV be offering one? For now, that seems unlikely. Speaking to the press, the ministry of foreign affairs has [dismissed the controversy](#) and taken the usual path: attacking those who brought up the issue.

Next time Beijing may want to change its approach. By apologizing, it would show the world that it is becoming an empathetic global power.

[Dani Madrid-Morales](#), PhD Fellow in Media and Communication, [City University of Hong Kong](#)

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

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UPS AND DOWNS

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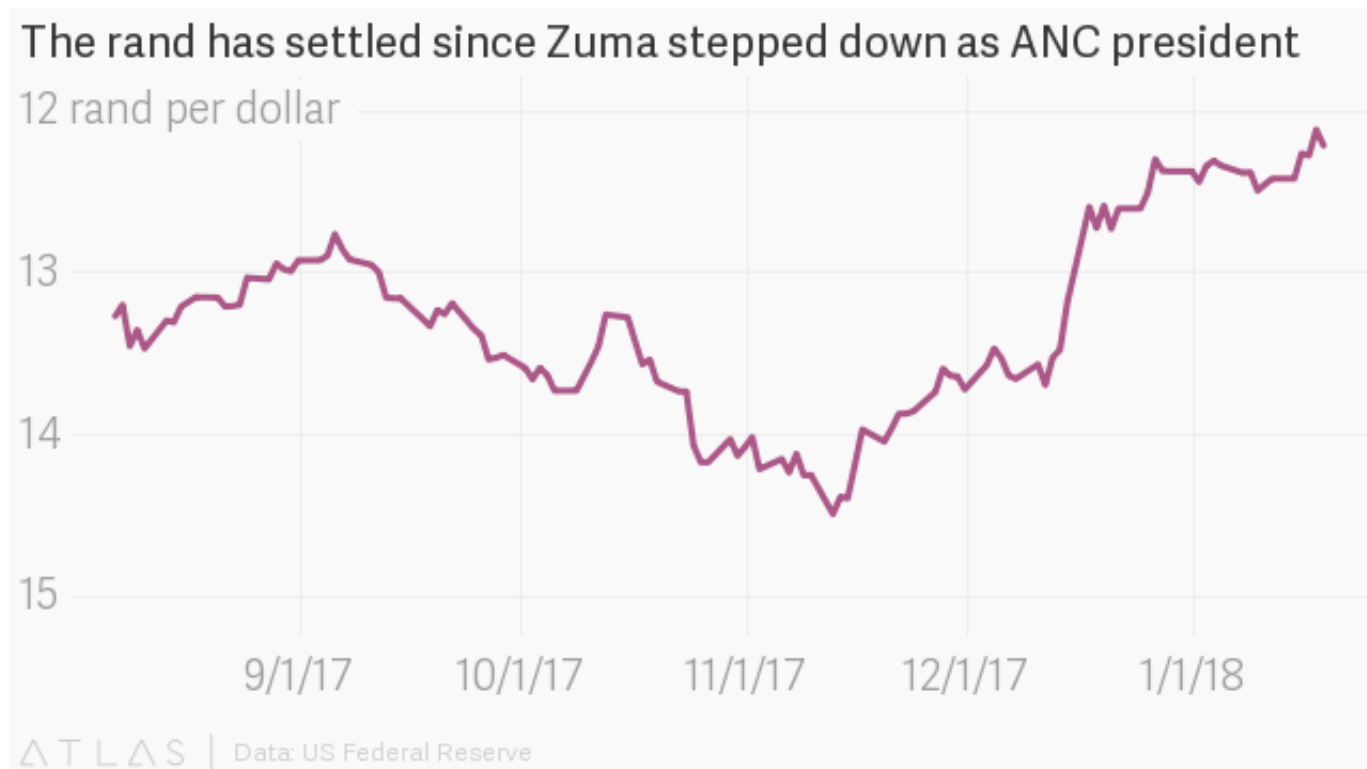
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South Africa's new president calls the current optimism experienced in the country as "a new dawn." It's a sentiment the country's volatile currency seems to have embraced, pushing below 12 rand to \$1 when Cyril Ramaphosa [took over](#) the ruling party. The currency, which has risen by some 15% in the last couple of months, maintains its newfound confidence as Ramaphosa became the country's fifth president and brought back finance minister Nhlanhla Nene—whose [2015 axing](#) first triggered the rand's downward spiral.

Once pegged to the country's vast gold reserves, the rand used to be 2:1 to the pound and [nearly as strong](#) as the dollar until a generation ago. Today, however, it seems pegged to the anxiety of post-apartheid South Africa. A stronger rand may boost the national psyche, but it's really not clear if South Africa really wants its currency to keep getting stronger.



Mixed messages

South Africa's sluggish economy [finally began to see growth](#) last quarter, thanks mainly to the agriculture, mining and manufacturing. A stronger rand may be the undoing of that, even if only in the short term as prices adjust, cautions Jeffrey Dinham, an economist at the [Johannesburg firm Econometrix](#).

For a commodities-driven economy like South Africa's, the stronger rand means lower revenues. It also isn't good news for manufacturing exports, weakening the country's competitiveness. The agriculture sector could experience a [similar revenue challenge](#), while it already faces [lower output](#) due to the drought in the Western Cape but at least farmers can [service their debt](#) better.

For companies' stocks too, a stronger rand is a mixed blessing. Companies listed both at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and abroad lose value in the

immediate outlook, explains Michael Treherne, a portfolio manager at [Johannesburg-based Vestact](#). In the long term, offshore profits are also worth less in rands. On the plus side though, companies looking to expand globally will find it cheaper to do so.

“I think the key is to have a stable currency,” said Treherne. “Stable allows people to make predictions, which helps boost confidence.”

Mind over matter

In recent years the rand weakened, South African [consumer confidence dipped](#) to apartheid-era lows. The sovereign credit rating downgrade by two ratings companies was [top of mind](#) for many and the [weak rand](#) hiked inflation, affecting the price of everyday items. Already indebted both in the state coffers and ordinary households, the downgrade made debt [even more expensive](#).

The grim outlook had an impact on the economy and the country’s psyche so the rand’s rise boosts that confidence “when people see inflation falling, when they see their money is worth more in dollars and euros,” said Dinham.

“From a consumer perspective, a strong rand is definitely a good thing,” said Dinham. Consumer spending [makes up](#) about 60% of the GDP and South Africans buying more goods boosts the economy. A stronger rand keeps transport and fuel costs down since South Africa is an oil importer, he said. That, along with lower inflation, keeps food prices down, which to most South Africans feels more real to their pockets than policies from Pretoria and Cape Town.

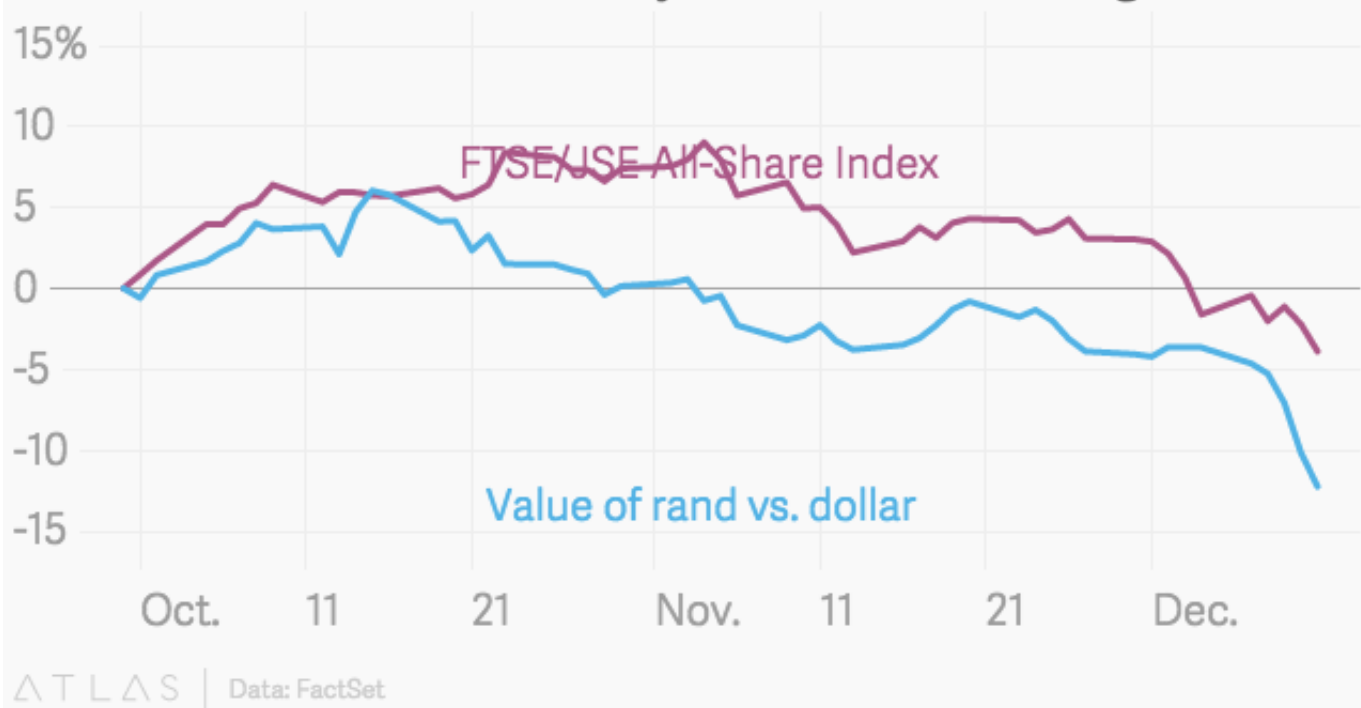
“A lot of things that are driven by sentiment also have a real impact on the economy,” said Dinham. The [usually jittery currency stayed firm](#) as now former president Jacob Zuma’s [corruption-addled administration](#) began to end.

A malleable currency

South Africa’s currency is prone to manipulation, though. Last year, the country’s Competition Commision found that 17 [banks, both local and international, were colluding](#) on the rand dollar exchange rate to turn a profit.

Like Turkey, Russia and Brazil, South Africa’s economy allows large amounts of capital to flow in, making their currencies attractive to forex traders, explains Dinham. The rand was ranked the [20th most traded currency](#) in 2016, with daily trades accounting for 1% of the global daily currency trading market, according to the [triennial survey](#) (pdf) by the Bank for International Settlements.

South African stocks and currency react to Nene's sacking



The factors behind this new optimism are [similar to those that drove](#) the 2015 drop: Zuma's cabinet shuffle signaled political instability, there was a drought across the east of the country and China's devaluation of the yuan took a number of developing country currencies down with it.

For the immediate future, it seems South Africa's currency may remain strong. In a global economy, however, there's only so much a country can do to control its strands in a wobbly web of international markets.

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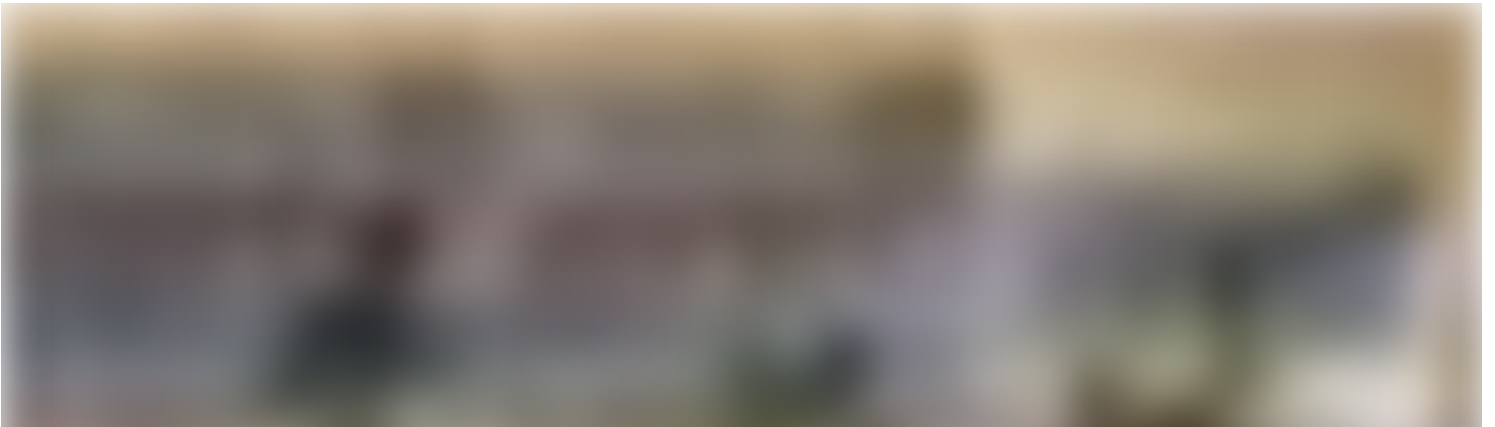
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There has been global applause for a teacher in Ghana who posted photos of himself drawing on a blackboard with multi-colored chalk, the features of a Microsoft Word processing window. The students in his class can also be seen drawing it into their notebooks.

Social media exploded in admiration and wonder at his effort to explain how computers work—without computers.

Richard Appiah Akoto, 33, is the information and communication technology (ICT) teacher at Betenase M/A Junior High School in the town of Sekyedomase, about two and half hours drive north of Ghana's second city, Kumasi. The school has no computers even though since 2011, 14 and 15-year-olds are expected to write and pass a national exam (without which students cannot progress to high school) with ICT being one of the subjects.

“This is not my first time [of drawing] it. I have been doing it anytime I am in the classroom...I like posting pictures on Facebook so I just felt like [sharing it]. I didn't know it would get the attention of people like that”, says Akoto, who has been a teacher at the school for six years.

On Facebook, Akoto goes by the nickname “Owura Kwadwo Hottish” which was the name that went viral on both Facebook and Twitter. His photo was seen as both a bit of ironic fun about life in Africa but also as a source of

inspiration particularly for Africans in the tech community like the Cameroonian tech entrepreneur Rebecca Enonchong, who tweets as @africatechie.

The photos gained prominence [after a popular Ghanaian comedian \(who is also a teacher\)](#) shared it with his 140,000 Facebook fans and later picked up by international websites and tech enthusiasts on the continent. After Enonchong tweeted about him she reached out to Microsoft on Twitter. This has culminated in a promise by Microsoft to “equip [Akoto] with a device from one of our partners, and access to our MCE program & free professional development resources on.” Akoto, however adds that the school needs about 50 computers in order for his classes to really fulfill its promise.

Supporting teachers to enable digital transformation in education is at the core of what we do. We will equip Owura Kwadwo with a device from one of our partners, and access to our MCE program & free professional development resources on <https://t.co/dJ6loRUOdg>

— Microsoft Africa (@MicrosoftAfrica) [February 27, 2018](#)

Although he has a personal laptop, he does not use it because the features differ from what is in the official syllabus which require him to teach his students among other things parts of a system unit and monitor, the steps in connecting them and how to boot a computer with a desktop as their reference. “[So] if you bring a charged laptop to class and just press the power button, then all of a sudden, everything will be on”, that does not work, he says.

That written exam relies on students’ ability to remember what is in the syllabus, which has not been updated since its introduction. Last year, only

one of his students managed to get an A.

“Definitely those in Accra [Ghana’s capital] will pass the exam because you cannot compare someone who is in front of a computer, who knows what he is doing with the mouse to someone who has not had a feel of a computer mouse before”, says Akoto.

ICT class in Ghana.

No computer, no problem.

(ht Owura Kwadwo Hottish) pic.twitter.com/PEc6mq78So

— ian bremmer (@ianbremmer) [February 26, 2018](#)

While Akoto has been described as an inspiration for teachers in Africa, what he does is symptomatic of an under-resourced dysfunctional public school system. Across the continent, many poor parents are [forced to choose private schools](#) over free public primary schools due to this lack of resources in government-owned schools. In Ghana, there have also been calls for a national conversation about a fairer distribution of educational resources as many rural schools like Betenase struggle with infrastructure and teaching logistics challenges.

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